

# Poland



*USS Clarke prior to being turned over to Polish navy.*

AP/Wide World Photos (Gary C. Knapp)

## Prepares for the Alliance

By JEFFREY SIMON

In March 1999, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined NATO. Of these three new members of the Atlantic Alliance, only Poland enhances Allied military capabilities. Poles are currently participating in Allied operations on the ground. The 18<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Battalion is serving with the U.S.-led multinational brigade in eastern Kosovo. In part, Poland's po-

tential reflects its stability, which can be attributed to a remarkable transformation in civil-military institutions. More than any other former member of the Warsaw Pact, the Polish Republic has been able to adapt to the NATO model for modern Western forces.

### The NATO Standard

Together, the Brussels Summit on the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program in 1994, the *Study on NATO Enlargement* released in 1995, the Madrid Summit in 1997 which invited the

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**Jeffrey Simon is a senior fellow in the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University, and the author of *NATO Enlargement and Central Europe: A Study in Civil Military Relations*.**

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## Rzeczpospolita Polska (Polish Republic)

**Defense Budget:** Estimated at \$3.2 billion for 2000; the gross domestic product in 1999 was \$157 billion (\$7,400 per capita).

**Manpower:** With a population of 38,648,000, Poland has a total of 4,422,000 men between 18 and 32 years of age. Active military strength is 217,290. Reserve forces number 406,000—army, 343,000; navy, 14,000; and air force, 49,000.

**Armed Forces:** Poland has an army of 132,750 soldiers and 1,704 main battle tanks; a navy with 16,860 sailors and 3 submarines, 3 principal surface combatants, 25 patrol/coastal craft, 24 mine warfare vessels, and naval aviation with 2,460 personnel and 28 combat aircraft; and an air force with 46,200 members and 267 combat aircraft.

**Paramilitary Formations:** A total of 21,500 personnel serve in border guard and police units.

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2000–2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2000).

three new members and implemented the enhancement of PFP, and the Membership Action Plan (MAP) launched at the Washington Summit in 1999, created coherent principles for enlarging the Alliance. NATO established explicit conditions for membership including active participation in PFP, MAP, and Allied operations, performing democratic political institutions, privatized economies, respect for human rights, and orderly foreign relations. Other standards were democratic control of the military and substantial interoperability and political compatibility with NATO.

To meet the civil-military criteria four conditions appear necessary:

- *A clear division of authority between the president and government (prime minister and defense/interior minister).* This must be established by a written constitution or public law, designating who commands and controls the military, promotes officers in peacetime, holds emergency powers in a crisis, and has authority to declare war. Underlining these formalities must be evidence of respect and tolerance between the executive and legislative branches.

- *Parliamentary oversight of the military through control of the defense budget.* This authority should include defense, security, and foreign affairs committees to provide minority and opposition parties with information and allow consultation, particularly



Raising Polish flag at NATO headquarters, March 1999.

on defense budgets and extraordinary commissions investigating security violations. Committees need staff expertise and sufficient information to support the review of defense programs and liaison with defense and interior ministries and to develop bipartisan consensus. Similarly, intelligence oversight committees should provide access to opposition parties.

- *Peacetime government oversight of general staffs and commanders through civilian defense ministries.* Defense ministry management should include preparation of the defense budget, access to intelligence, involvement in strategic and defense planning to include force structure development, arms acquisitions, deployments, personnel development, and military promotions.

- *Restoration of military prestige, trustworthiness, accountability, and operational effectiveness.* Having emerged from the communist period when the military was controlled by the Soviet High Command through the Warsaw Pact and was often an instrument of oppression, post-communist civil communities must perceive the military as being under democratic control. In addition to institutional and constitutional checks and balances, general staffs must be accountable to civil officials. A legal framework and code of conduct for professional soldiers and conscripts that would allow soldiers to disobey illegal orders is also required. Finally, military training levels and equipment must also be sufficient to protect the state. This calls for adequate social support and a predictable stream of resources.

## Making the Journey

The transformation to a democratic state has been a continuous though fractious process of multi-stage development in Poland. It began in 1988 on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet empire. After a decade of unrest, the communist government reached an accommodation with the opposition. The official Polish United Worker's Party recognized pluralism for political and trade unions. In return, a powerful new office of president was established under Wojciech Jaruzelski, who quickly wrested control of the National Defense Council—together with both the defense and interior ministries—from the Communist Party and placed it under his own control. In April 1989 the council was further restructured from a supra-governmental agency to a state organ subordinate to parliament, further distancing the military from direct party control.

The overwhelming defeat of the Communist Party in the general parliamentary elections of June 1989 and choice of Tadeusz Mazowiecki as the first noncommunist prime minister stimulated further reforms. Parliament exerted greater authority after the elections, and reformers controlled a third of the upper house (Sejm) and senate. An ad hoc group of Solidarity leaders and members of parliament formed





foiled efforts to draft a new constitution. Frustrated, Walesa pushed for parliamentary elections two and a half years early. Elections in October 1991 selected the nation's third consecutive noncommunist prime minister, Jan Olszewski, which presented another opportunity to revise the national security structure. As a result of these elections, executive and legislative institutions were fully democratic although glaring weaknesses remained: a heavily fragmented and weak coalition government and the absence of a constitution.

Debate over a constitution sparked a political showdown between parliament and president. Ambiguity in authority and differences in interpretation over command and control caused the downfall of the Olszewski government, including the first civilian defense minister, Jan Parys, who exacerbated the confrontation by alleging that Walesa had been planning contingencies to rule by martial law. A Sejm commission investigating the charges exonerated the president.

A new government under a non-communist prime minister, Hanna Suchocka, brought hope of cooperation among the parliament, ministry, and president. In October 1992, the new defense minister, Onyszkiewicz, implemented an interministerial commission on defense ministry reform. In addition, military courts and intelligence were subordinated to the civilian defense minister, who proposed further reform. The Onyszkiewicz initiatives encountered resistance, however. Attempts to fuse civilian and military budget and personnel activities and set up an independent department for managing infrastructure and acquisition were blocked by the general staff.

Ministry efforts were further limited by Walesa's appointment of General Tadeusz Wilecki as chief of the general staff. Wilecki continued to arrogate power by bringing his military district commanders under the general staff. As a result, that body effectively maintained autonomy by playing off civilian defense ministry oversight against the authority the generals garnered from presidential support. Thus four parties struggled for control of the military: parliament, presidency, defense ministry, and general staff.

oversight groups within the ministry of defense. Bronislaw Komorowski and Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Solidarity civilians, became deputy defense ministers and began to eliminate the Main Political Administration (a Communist organ of control) from the military. Civilians also took control of contact with other countries and international organizations, in part to ensure that Moscow did not exercise command of

### **Walesa chaired the defense council, providing reformers with de facto control of the military and police**

Polish forces through the Warsaw Pact. Meanwhile, Piotr Kolodziejczyk, an independent-minded admiral, became defense minister and General Zdzislaw Stelmazuk, who had not attended a Soviet staff college, became chief of the general staff.

Even as Jaruzelski's prestige fell after the elections, noncommunists assumed positions of authority in civilian and military institutions. Then,

with his resignation and call for new elections, the stage was set for further change. Votes cast in December 1990 brought Solidarity leader Lech Walesa to the presidency and the appointment of Jan Bielecki as the second noncommunist prime minister, initiating a new round of military reforms with power shifting from a partially communist parliament to the president. Walesa chaired the defense council, providing reformers with de facto control of the military and police. He also exercised oversight of the defense ministry through the National Security Bureau, responsible for developing military doctrine, conducting threat analyses, and drafting the reorganization of both the defense ministry and general staff.

As Walesa gained greater control, reform proved difficult to implement. Tensions between the communist-dominated Sejm on the one hand, and the senate and president on the other,



Lech Walesa  
with workers in  
Gdansk, 1983.

AP/Wide World Photos

In November 1992 further constitutional reform offered an opportunity to clarify legislative and executive authority. It failed because of continued ambiguity. Lack of consensus was evident in seven drafts submitted to the constitutional commission. The defense committee of the Sejm, for example, opposed presidential oversight of a national guard. There were also diverse views on the role of the executive in appointing ministers of defense, interior,

and foreign affairs. Inability to compromise blocked further progress.

Elections were again crucial to transformation. The Sejm and senate contests of September 1993 were a bitter setback for those political parties which emerged from the Solidarity movement, with the return of communists who took control of parliament and formed a coalition government. The appointment of Waldemar Pawlak as prime minister led to a renewed battle with the president for control of

the military, precipitating a constitutional crisis. Under the interim constitution the prime minister was required to consult with the president on selecting a defense minister. Walesa forced the reappointment of his old ally, Kolodziejczyk. The admiral immediately loosened control over the military. In November 1993 he reduced and consolidated the defense establishment and granted the general staff greater authority by transferring civilian departments back to the military, establishing new military directorates, and placing intelligence and counter-intelligence duties under the purview of senior officers.

Kolodziejczyk's initiatives were followed by the Drawsko affair, which threw fragile civil-military relations into further turmoil. At a September 1994 meeting of military cadres at Drawsko Pomorskie training grounds, Wilecki voiced support for Walesa's position to have the general staff function directly under the president rather than report to the defense ministry. The remarks drew parliamentary attention. A Sejm defense committee investigation revealed tensions among a general staff supporting direct presidential control, a parliament determined to play a supervisory role over the military, and a constitution that failed to distinguish a proper balance of power. The committee equivocated in its findings. Though it criticized the president for his behavior at Drawsko, it failed to react even after Walesa presented awards to Wilecki and other top military commanders after the incident. Drawsko and the Sejm report further undermined trust between parliament and president. Kolodziejczyk resigned, contributing to the Pawlak government's collapse.

The conflict between president and parliament reached crisis proportions. A civil-military quagmire resulted from not delineating the specific authorities of the president and defense ministry and from the inability of the Sejm to exercise effective oversight. It also reflected the failure of the civilian officials in the ministry to exercise control over senior officers on the general staff.





**Celebrating Polish  
army day at Banja  
Vrucila, Bosnia.**

982° Signal Company, Combat Camera (James V. Dowen, Jr.)

Elections intervened to shape the defense revolution. After the inauguration of Aleksander Kwasniewski in December 1995 and the formation of a socialist government under Prime Min-

### **Poland struggled for a consensus on the organization of a modern defense establishment**

ister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, parliament searched for a legislative solution to the problems of civil-military control. The result was the enactment of the Law on the Office of the Defense Minister in February 1996, which added

a deputy defense minister to deal with the budget and increased civilian oversight. In addition, the chief of general staff formally became a deputy minister. These changes wrested control from the general staff and subordinated generals to the defense ministry.

The September 1997 return of the Solidarity-led government led by Jerzy Buzek and a new form of cohabitation with a socialist president under a new constitution redefined the powers of the president and administration. Both branches tackled the issue of military

organization and control in a bipartisan manner. Land Forces Command was established with military districts subordinated to it rather than the general staff. In 1998 the general staff was restructured into a joint staff. With these final changes, Poland institutionalized civil control over the military prior to acceding to NATO.

### **Unfinished Revolution**

Poland struggled for a consensus on the organization of a modern defense establishment. The demise of the Communist Party created a void. The control of the armed forces became the centerpiece of a constitutional contest for power. The way the general staff played the president against the prime and defense ministers brought the military an independence not found elsewhere in Central Europe. Thus the general staff gained enormous influence vis-à-vis civilian institutions. This independence was facilitated by Walesa's desire to finally seize control from the communists and by instability at the top levels of the defense ministry.

Since the passage of the Law on the Office of the Defense Minister and a new constitution, efforts at solidifying ministerial management responsibility and oversight of the general staff can be seen as relatively successful. Yet tension between the president and government remain. Current problems result from the continued inability to delimit presidential authority in the area of defense affairs.

The capacity of the Sejm for oversight has shown remarkable improvement, but limitations persist. Since its beginnings in 1989–90, the Sejm defense committee has only slowly developed an expert staff. In particular, its chairman publicly recognized shortfalls in supervising military intelligence. He also acknowledged that although the Supreme Chamber of Control has slightly improved its ability to monitor the defense budget, it will take years before the Sejm can develop the methods employed in advanced democracies.

Despite limited support mechanisms, legislators have exerted greater influence. Parliament has exercised some control through constrained budgets. In addition, the Sejm has



NATO training at Camp White Eagle, Kosovo.

982: Signal Company, Combat Camera (Jason Heisch)

demonstrated limited supervision over military administration. It began with the Defense Reform Law in 1996 and rules on military rotation and term limits on general staff assignments and army reform. The increased oversight also has been evident in questions on acquisition (such as helicopters, fighter aircraft, and artillery) as well as personnel policy and other reforms.

Despite initial limits, the defense ministry has shown significant structural and functional differentiation since the interministerial commission. The reform concept and subsequent actions appear to hit the mark. Efforts to empower the ministry by providing accountability, subordinating and limiting the functions of the general staff to civilian authority, and reforming the armed forces through budgetary measures and acquisition practices have been appropriate objectives.

In addition, the nation has tackled the issue of preparedness. Personnel have been cut and readiness problems have been evident in all services as well as the Polish element of Implementation Force (IFOR)/Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia. Contrasted with other countries in Central Europe, however, a defense budget increase in

1995 reversed a slide that had begun in 1986. While it represents a commitment of 2.08 percent of the gross domestic product in 2000, there is an apparent—albeit unrealized promise—to increase this level of spending to 3 percent. Moreover, compared with Hungarians and Czechs, Poles hold the armed forces in high esteem. Finally, Poland has developed institutions for intergovernmental security planning with a capacity to prioritize national objectives.

### The Way Ahead

As an enlarged NATO becomes a reality, Poland and other new members must define their military role in European security. Their decisions are particularly vital in light of criteria often cited by the current members of the Alliance in justifying enlargement, which include promoting stability through institutionalizing common values, enhancing core tasks through strengthened territorial defense and contributions to rapid reaction forces, and developing capabilities for out-of-area operations.

NATO will soon be able to measure these objectives against evolving realities among new members. The extent to which these newcomers realize their potentialities will greatly influence the future of the Alliance.

Each new member faces three challenges. The first is military integration. If they succeed in this effort the Alliance will be strengthened and poised for further enlargement. But if these new members fail to meet force goal targets, and if NATO concludes that the first enlargement tranche has added consumers rather than producers, the commitment to enlargement could be undercut and regional security could be compromised.

Second, integration is not so much an issue of modernization as it is building an institution that is widely supported by society and government, and whose forces can fulfill Alliance tasks such as territorial defense, rapid reaction, and meeting out-of-area commitments.

Third, even though PFP has been critical in developing a sense of regional stability, NATO must not focus on new members. Moreover, the new members—beyond meeting force goal targets and voicing support for the partnership—must devote resources to the program.

As a former partner, Poland is particularly helpful in dealing with such challenges. It can help other nations more effectively implement PFP. Partners should note the Polish experience in establishing a solid foundation for civil-military relations.

Fair and open elections, compromise and restraint among competing parties, constitutional experimentation and reform, and transparency in the political process all contributed to forging new state structures for civil-military relations in Poland. By combining these elements with sensible defense reorganization and a modicum of material and popular support, this new member of the Alliance has demonstrated that the NATO model is viable.

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